

TOP COW

# J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI'S MIDNIGHT NATION

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image

9 \$2.50  
US  
JAN

STRACZYNSKI  
FRANK  
SIBAL  
MILLA  
DREAMER

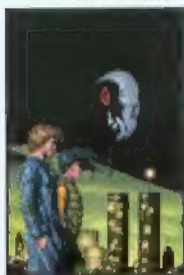


OBI

midnight nation  
created by j. michael straczynski

"EXPLANATIONS, VALID AND OTHERWISE"

COVER  
gary frank  
jonathan sibal  
matt milla



**Previously:**

The walkers' hold on David reaches a fever pitch as he and Laurel have to run the "Gauntlet", the two are drawing closer to their destination when David encounters a future version of himself. After David learns of the reality that lies ahead, Laurel asks for a second time if David wants it all to end but he is determined to carry on. We left them last time as they entered New York City...

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"If you're wondering why the WTC towers are on the cover and this page, it's because the events in this book take place before 09/11/01 —P.S."



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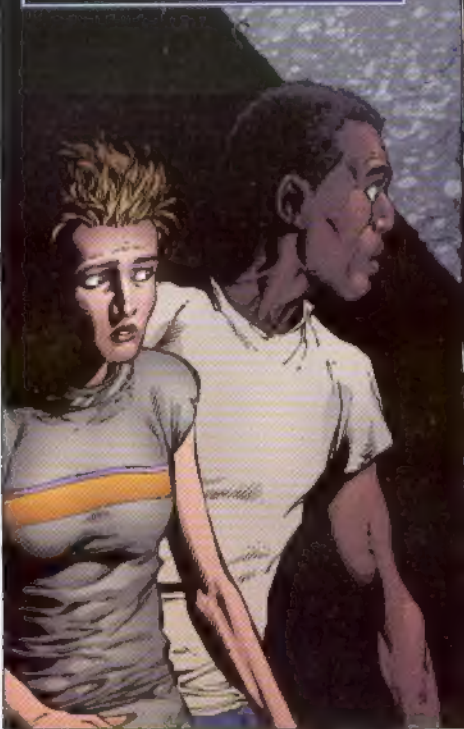


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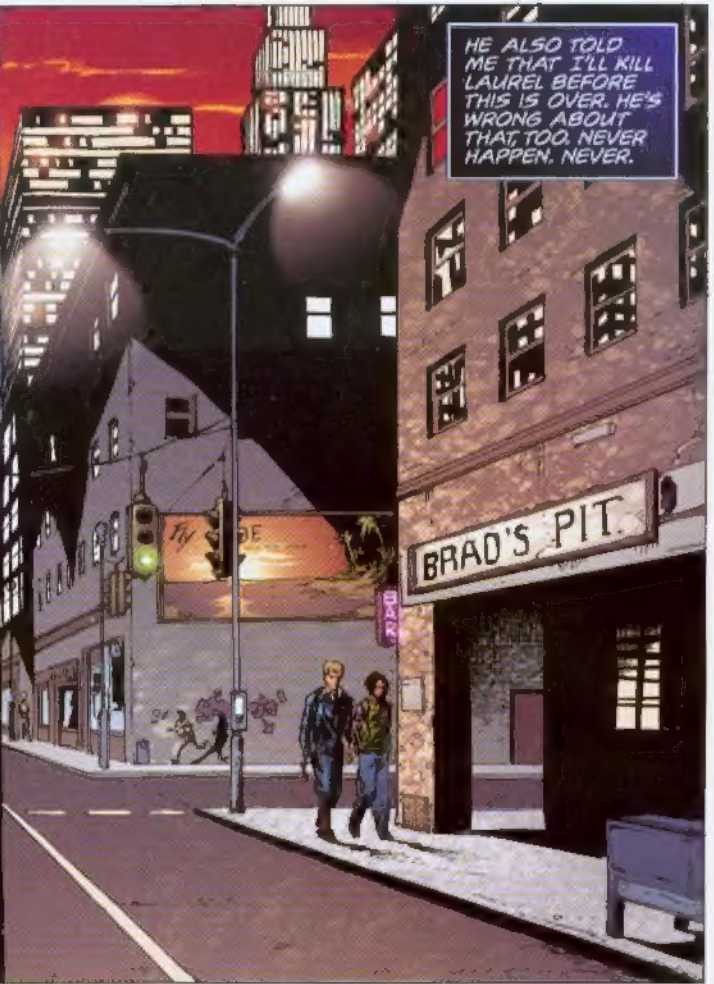
PRINTED IN CANADA

WE FINALLY MADE IT TO NEW YORK. THE PLACE WHERE I MAY BE ABLE TO GET MY SOUL BACK.

EVEN THOUGH THE FUTURE ME TOLD THE PRESENT ME THAT IT DOESN'T HAPPEN, THAT I DON'T GET MY SOUL BACK. BUT WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE HIM...WELL, ME? I'VE BEEN WRONG BEFORE.



HE ALSO TOLD ME THAT I'LL KILL LAUREL BEFORE THIS IS OVER. HE'S WRONG ABOUT THAT, TOO. NEVER HAPPEN. NEVER.



I WON'T HAVE IT.





SOMETHING FEELS...DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS PLACE. I MEAN, WE'VE BEEN IN BIG CITIES BEFORE, CHICAGO, DETROIT...BUT THIS...IT'S AS IF YOU CAN FEEL THE FEAR ON EVERYBODY.

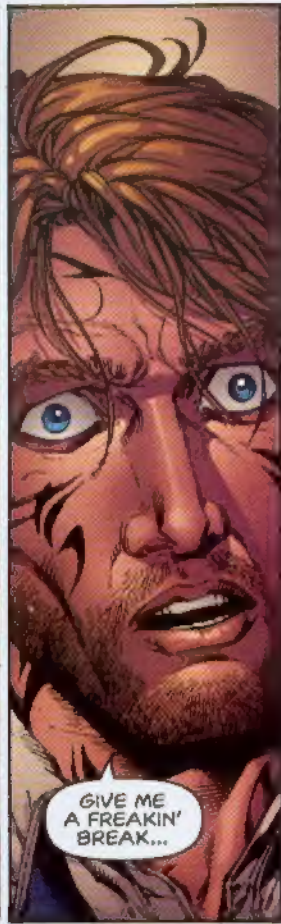


YOU WEAR THE MARKS OF A WALKER. AND THE WALKERS GO UNCHALLENGED HERE. THEY DO WHAT THEY WANT, TO ANYONE THEY WANT. THAT'S HALF OF IT.

SO WHAT'S THE OTHER HALF?



RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER.



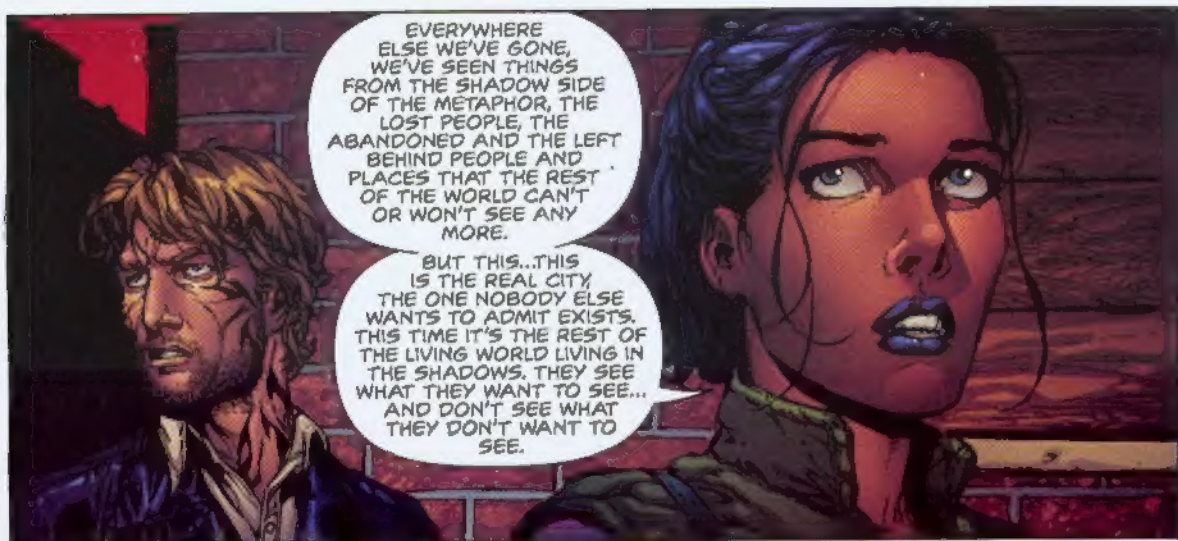
GIVE ME A FREAKIN' BREAK...



I DON'T GET IT...I KNOW NEW YORK, I'VE BEEN TO NEW YORK, IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THIS.

YOU'RE SEEING HIS INFLUENCE. THE ONE WHO TOOK YOUR SOUL.

HE HAS INFLUENCE EVERYWHERE. BUT NONE OF THE OTHER CITIES WE WENT THROUGH LOOKED LIKE THIS.



EVERYWHERE ELSE WE'VE GONE, WE'VE SEEN THINGS FROM THE SHADOW SIDE OF THE METAPHOR, THE LOST PEOPLE, THE ABANDONED AND THE LEFT BEHIND PEOPLE AND PLACES THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD CAN'T OR WON'T SEE ANY MORE.

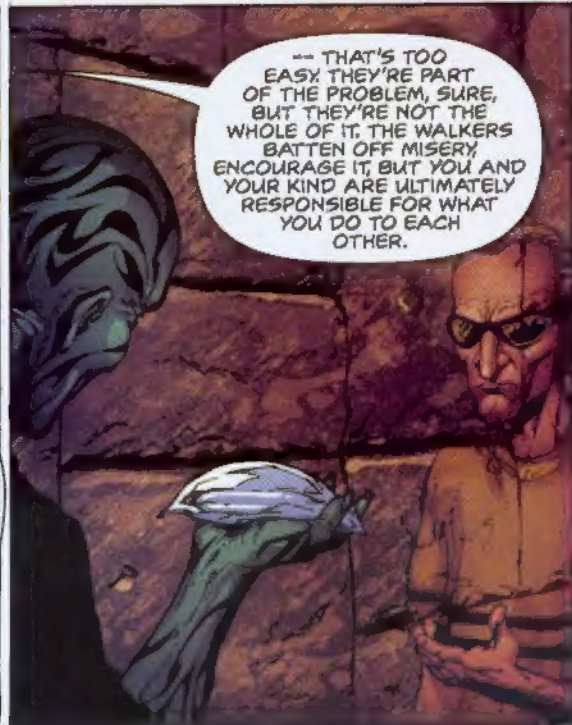
BUT THIS...THIS IS THE REAL CITY THE ONE NOBODY ELSE WANTS TO ADMIT EXISTS. THIS TIME IT'S THE REST OF THE LIVING WORLD LIVING IN THE SHADOWS. THEY SEE WHAT THEY WANT TO SEE... AND DON'T SEE WHAT THEY DON'T WANT TO SEE.



THE FURTHER THE MISERY SPREADS, THE DEEPER IT GOES, THE STRONGER HIS FOOTHOLD BECOMES, AND THE MORE EVERY PLACE WILL BECOME LIKE THIS PLACE.

THAT'S WHAT THE WALKERS WERE DOING WHEN I STUMBLED ACROSS THEM IN L.A., WASN'T IT? GETTING SUPPLIES OF DRUGS TO THE DEALERS, HAVING PEOPLE KILLED TO KEEP THE SECRET...SO THEY'RE THE ONES RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THE CRAP IN THE CITIES, THEY'RE --

NO --



-- THAT'S TOO EASY. THEY'RE PART OF THE PROBLEM, SURE, BUT THEY'RE NOT THE WHOLE OF IT. THE WALKERS BATTEN OFF MISERY, ENCOURAGE IT, BUT YOU AND YOUR KIND ARE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT YOU DO TO EACH OTHER.



WHY DO YOU SAY ME AND MY KIND? I MEAN, AREN'T YOU --

GOOD. I SEE YOU MADE IT AT LAST.

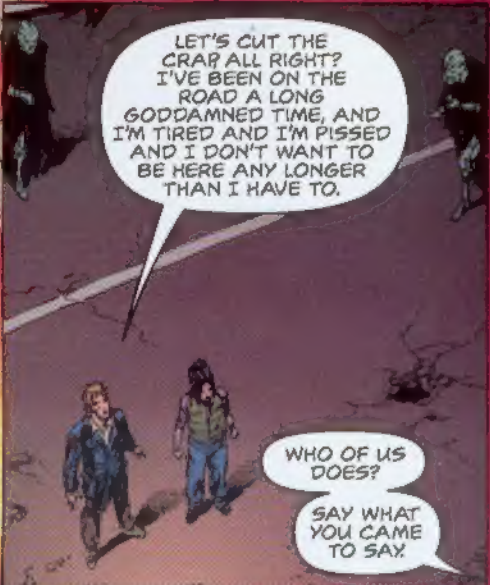


AND  
ALMOST A  
WEEK TO SPARE.  
I THINK THAT MAY  
BE A RECORD.  
AND SPEAKING  
OF WEARY  
TRAVELERS...



HELLO,  
LAUREL.

IT'S  
GOOD TO  
SEE YOU  
AGAIN.



LET'S CUT THE  
CRAP ALL RIGHT?  
I'VE BEEN ON THE  
ROAD A LONG  
GODDAMNED TIME, AND  
I'M TIRED AND I'M PISSED  
AND I DON'T WANT TO  
BE HERE ANY LONGER  
THAN I HAVE TO.

WHO OF US  
DOES?

SAY WHAT  
YOU CAME  
TO SAY.



MY SOUL.  
YOU'VE GOT  
IT, I WANT IT  
BACK.



OF COURSE. IT'S RIGHT HERE. YOU CAN HAVE IT BACK WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT. I WILL GIVE IT TO YOU FREELY.

OKAY, WHEN IS THE TIME RIGHT?

I DECIDE THAT, BUT I WILL BE FAIR. SAY, IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, I WILL OFFER IT TO YOU FREELY, AND YOU MAY TAKE IT FREELY. NO TRICKS, NO CONDITIONS. YOU ARE MY CHILD. I LOVE YOU, AS I LOVE ALL MY CHILDREN. I CAN DENY YOU NOTHING. LAUREL WILL CONFIRM THAT ONCE MY WORD IS GIVEN, IT IS NEVER BROKEN.

SO I GIVE YOU MY WORD THAT I WILL NOT OPPOSE YOU WHEN IT IS TIME TO RECLAIM YOUR SOUL.



BUT BEFORE THAT CAN HAPPEN, THERE IS MUCH I HAVE TO SHOW YOU, MUCH YOU HAVE TO LEARN, FOR YOUR OWN GOOD. SO YOU MAY UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS WHEN YOU FINALLY TAKE BACK WHAT IS YOURS.

TAKE THEM.



YAAAAAAHHHHH!

SONOFABITCH -- LET GO -- LAUREL, STAY CLOSE!

LAUREL?



LAUREL?!



IT'S ALL RIGHT...

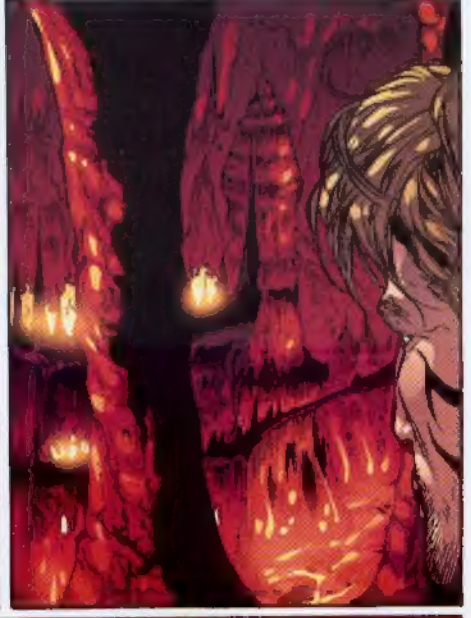
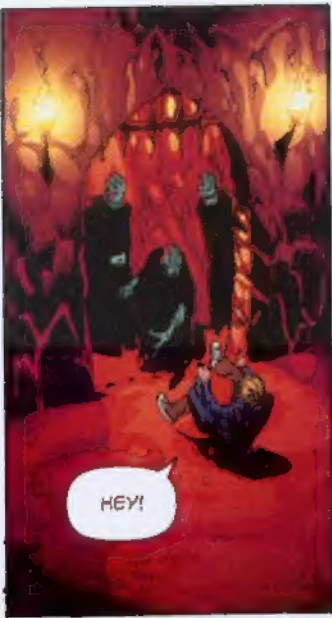


...DO AS YOU MUST.



NOOOOOO!!!







YEAH?



SHAH-SHAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!



NO FREAKING WAY.



I HOPE YOU WILL FORGIVE THE MOMENTARY INCONVENIENCE.

IT'S FOR YOUR OWN GOOD, REALLY. TO PROTECT YOU FROM YOURSELF



I'VE FOUND THAT SOMETIMES PEOPLE WHO COME THROUGH HERE REACT POORLY TO THE SITUATION. SOME EVEN HURT THEMSELVES. I DON'T WANT THAT TO HAPPEN.



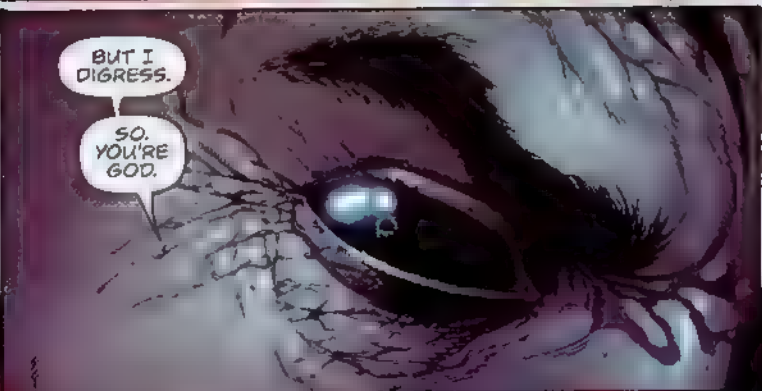
LET'S  
PRETEND, JUST  
FOR THE  
MOMENT, THAT  
YOU'RE GOD.

AND REALLY WHY  
NOT? EVERYBODY ELSE  
DOES. PEOPLE WHO FAILED  
BIOLOGY 101 AND BASIC  
PHYSICS THINK THEY CAN DO  
AS GOOD A JOB AT DESIGNING  
COSMOLOGIES AND  
PLATYPUSES AND COMETS  
AS THE MAKER OF ALL  
THINGS. VANITY.



BUT EVEN  
UNSKILLED LABOR  
MIGHT PRODUCE A  
BETTER RESULT. AT  
LEAST THEIR HEARTS  
WOULD BE IN THE  
RIGHT PLACE.

AT LEAST IT  
WOULDN'T BE JUST  
ONE BIG TRAGIC SETUP..  
A BALLOON WAITING FOR  
SOMEONE TO STICK A PIN  
IN IT AND SHOW IT FOR  
THE FRAUD IT IS.



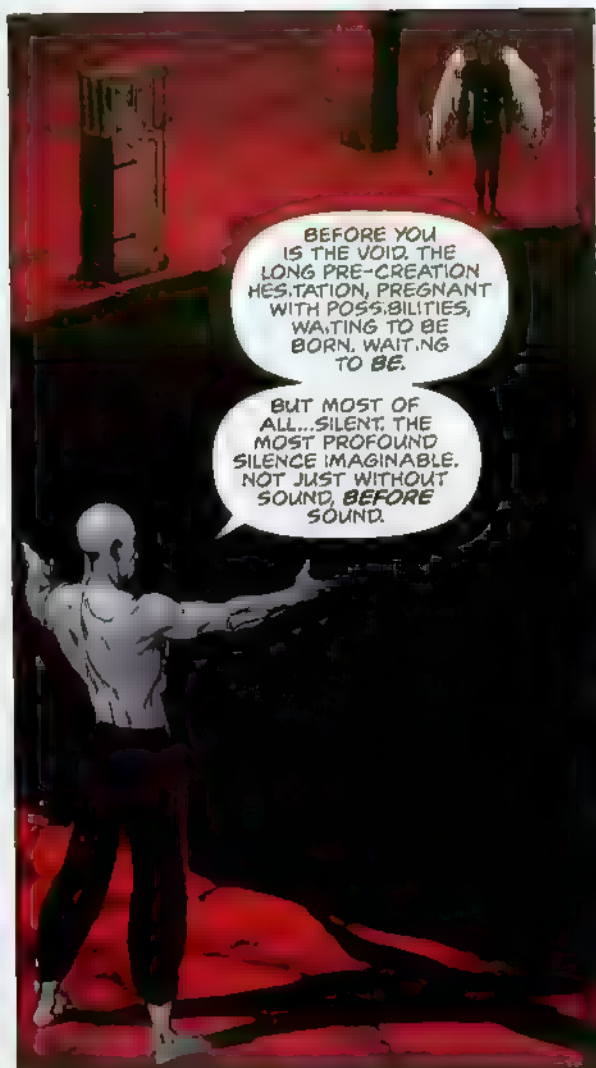
BUT I  
DIGRESS.

SO.  
YOU'RE  
GOD.



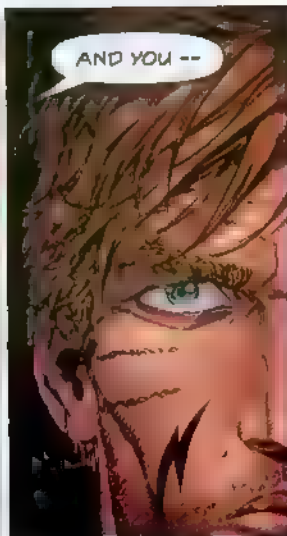
HOW DO  
YOU LIKE IT  
SO FAR?

THIS IS  
PROFOUNDLY  
STUPID.

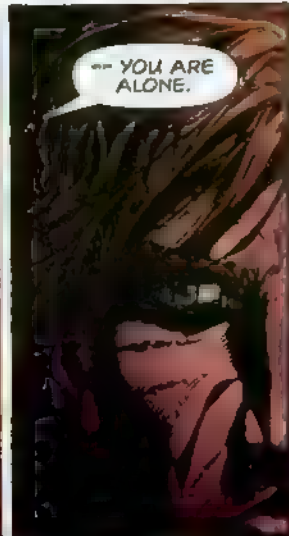


BEFORE YOU  
IS THE VOID. THE  
LONG PRE-CREATION  
HESITATION, PREGNANT  
WITH POSSIBILITIES,  
WAITING TO BE  
BORN. WAITING  
TO BE.

BUT MOST OF  
ALL... SILENT. THE  
MOST PROFOUND  
SILENCE IMAGINABLE.  
NOT JUST WITHOUT  
SOUND, *BEFORE*  
SOUND.



AND YOU --



-- YOU ARE  
ALONE.



AND REALLY  
WHO WANTS TO BE  
ALONE ALL THE TIME?  
ESPECIALLY SINCE TIME  
HASN'T EVEN BEEN  
INVENTED YET.

IT'S A  
TERRIBLE THING.  
A LONELINESS  
BEYOND  
DESCRIPTION.



AND EVEN  
THOUGH YOU *ARE*...  
YOU CANNOT *BE*...  
BECAUSE THERE IS NO  
PLACE FOR YOU TO  
BE IN.

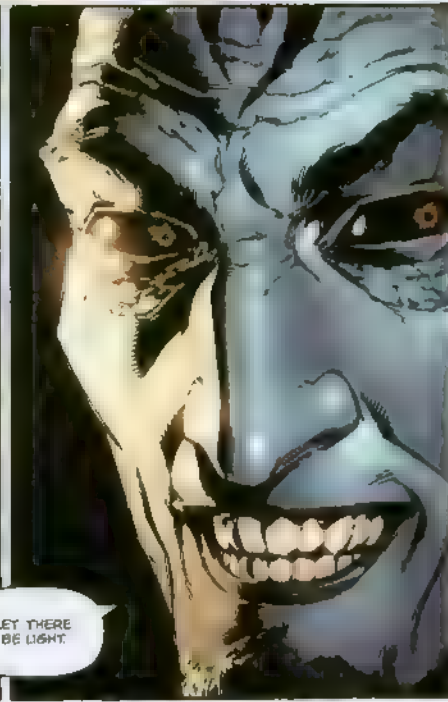


SO YOU  
CREATE  
ONE.

BECAUSE  
YOU'RE  
ALONE

BECAUSE  
YOU CAN.

BECAUSE IT  
KILLS THE TIME  
YOU JUST GOT  
AROUND TO  
INVENTING.



LET THERE  
BE LIGHT.

YOU SLAMMED  
MOLECULES TOGETHER  
AND BLEW THEM OUT  
INTO THE VOID.

PROTONS DANCED  
AND WAVE-FORMS  
FLICKERED. YOU IGNITED SUNS,  
NURTURED NUCLEOTIDES AND  
EXHALED PROTEINS THAT WOULD IN  
TIME BIRTH A MOZART AND PUT  
THE KNEES OF FLAMINGOS ON  
BACKWARD JUST FOR VARIETY  
AND THE HUMOR OF IT.

AS TIME PASSED --  
AND WHAT A HANDY LITTLE  
CREATION THAT WAS -- YOU  
GOT BETTER AT IT. YOU ABANDON  
SINGLE-CELLED CREATURES AND  
WORK YOUR WAY UP FROM  
PROTOZOA TO SAURIANS LIKE A  
SCULPTOR WORKING HIS WAY UP  
FROM A CLAY DOG TO A  
MONA LISA.





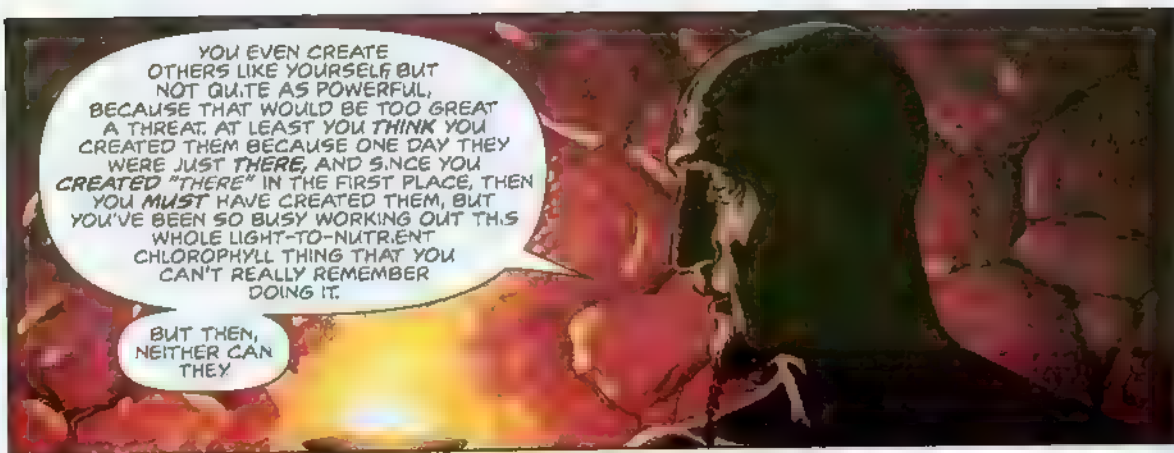
TOO BAD YOU  
HAVE TO HONE YOUR  
SKILLS BY KILLING ALL YOUR  
FAILURES. EVEN THOUGH THEY  
WERE INNOCENT. EVEN THOUGH  
THE FAULT WAS NOT THEIRS,  
BUT IN YOUR DESIGN.  
BECAUSE EVERYTHING  
YOU CREATE, DIES.

BECAUSE  
PRESS RELEASES  
AND PAMPHLETS  
NOTWITHSTANDING, YOU'RE  
NOT PERFECT. IF YOU WERE,  
YOU WOULDN'T HAVE DONE  
ALL THIS...ALL THIS...  
BECAUSE YOU WERE  
ALONE.

BECAUSE  
YOU FEARED  
THE VOID.

BECAUSE YOU  
HAD NOTHING  
BETTER TO DO.

BECAUSE  
YOU WERE  
BORED.



YOU EVEN CREATE OTHERS LIKE YOURSELF BUT NOT QUITE AS POWERFUL, BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE TOO GREAT A THREAT. AT LEAST YOU *THINK* YOU CREATED THEM BECAUSE ONE DAY THEY WERE JUST *THERE*, AND SINCE YOU CREATED "*THERE*" IN THE FIRST PLACE, THEN YOU *MUST* HAVE CREATED THEM, BUT YOU'VE BEEN SO BUSY WORKING OUT THIS WHOLE LIGHT-TO-NUTRIENT CHLOROPHYLL THING THAT YOU CAN'T REALLY REMEMBER DOING IT.

BUT THEN, NEITHER CAN THEY.



YOU TELL THEM ALL YOU'RE TRYING TO CREATE A BETTER WORLD, BUT IF YOU'RE AS PERFECT AS YOUR BIOGRAPHERS MAINTAIN, THEN WHY DIDN'T YOU GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME?

WHY'D YOU SCREW UP?



SOME OF THOSE AROUND YOU ASK JUST THAT QUESTION. YOU DON'T LIKE QUESTIONS, JUST OBEDIENCE.

BUT THE QUESTIONS CONTINUE. YOU TRY TO STOP THEM, YOU CAN'T.



AND THEN IT'S WAR. A WAR OF MISERY. A WAR ABOUT MISERY.



UNDERSTAND:  
ANYONE WOULD GET  
BORED DOING NOTHING  
BUT DESIGNING WORLDS  
FOR ETERNITY YOU WANT  
TO BE ENTERTAINED,  
AND EVERY AUTHOR  
NEEDS CONFLICT.



SO YOU  
INTRODUCE MISERY  
INTO AN EQUATION  
PREDICATED ON WHAT  
WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ONE  
SIMPLE PROPOSITION: THE  
HOPE THAT TOMORROW  
WILL BE BETTER THAN  
TODAY.



HAVE THINGS  
GOTTEN BETTER?  
ARE THEY  
CONTINUING TO GET  
BETTER? IS THE  
PROMISE VALID? OR  
IS THE PROMISE  
A LIE?

MONEY IS NOT THE  
ROOT OF ALL EVIL. MISERY IS.  
MISERY STARTS WARS, KILLS  
CHILDREN, DESTROYS SOULS. MISERY  
PROVES THE UNIVERSE IS UNCARING  
AND RANDOM AND CRUEL. MISERY  
PROVES THAT CREATION IS  
A LIE.



EVEN IF  
YOU'RE THE ONE  
CAUSING IT?

WE ALL CAUSE IT YOU  
CAUSED YOUR SHARE. YOU'VE  
SEEN THAT ON YOUR WAY HERE.  
EVEN WITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS,  
NEVER MEANING ANYONE  
HARM...YOU'VE HURT PEOPLE YOU  
LOVED AND TURNED YOUR  
BACK ON OTHERS

AND YOU'RE  
STILL MISSING  
THE POINT.

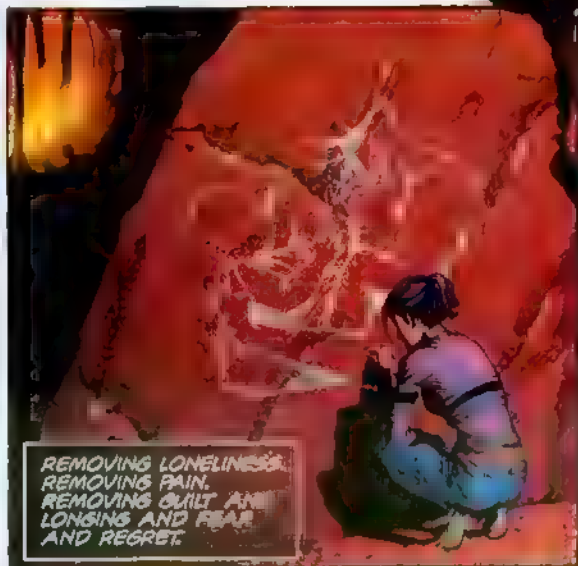


YOU'RE GOD.  
EVERYTHING  
THAT IS, YOU MADE.  
SO WHY NOT JUST  
LEAVE MISERY OUT  
OF THE EQUATION  
IN THE FIRST  
PLACE?

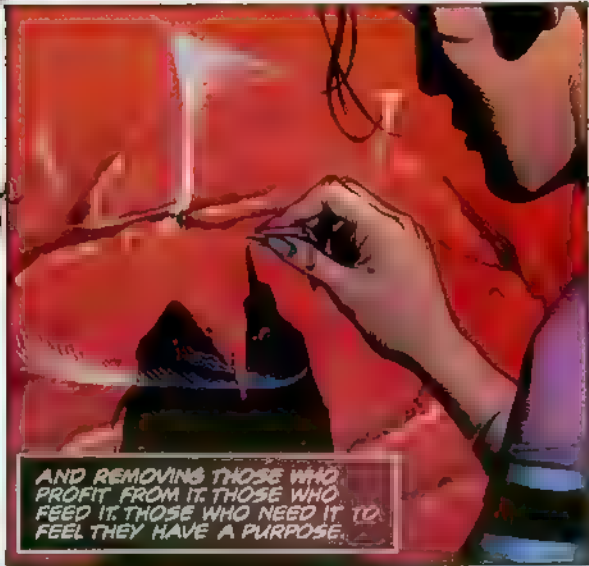
IT DOESN'T  
EXIST NATURALLY.  
NOTHING DOES.  
EVERYTHING HAD TO  
BE CREATED. WHY GO  
OUT OF YOUR WAY  
TO CREATE  
MISERY?

THAT'S WHAT  
ALL THIS IS  
ABOUT. THAT'S  
WHAT THE WAR IS  
ALL ABOUT.

REMOVING  
MISERY FROM THE  
EQUATION.



REMOVING LONELINESS.  
REMOVING PAIN.  
REMOVING GUILT AND  
LONGINGS AND FEAR  
AND REGRET.



AND REMOVING THOSE WHO  
PROFIT FROM IT THOSE WHO  
FEED IT THOSE WHO NEED IT TO  
FEEL THEY HAVE A PURPOSE.



THERE IS NO HELL.  
THERE IS NO HEAVEN.  
NO BEYOND TO FEAR.  
NO FINAL EXHALATION  
OF STARS.



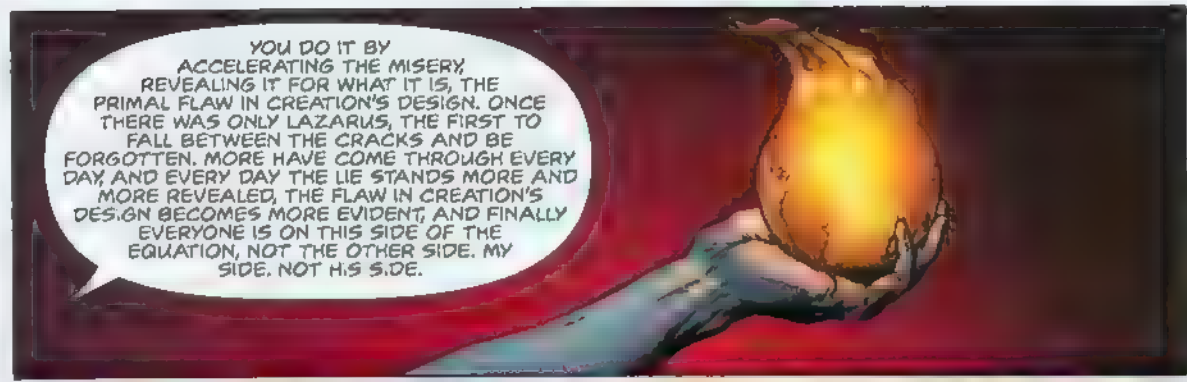
THERE IS ONLY THE  
CYCLE OF LIFE AND  
DEATH REPEATED  
INFINITELY



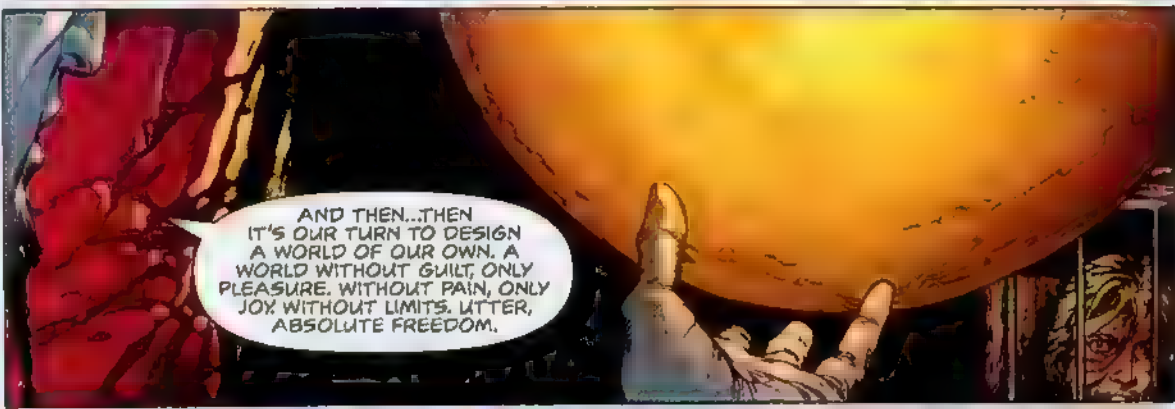
YOU COME, YOU  
GO, YOU COME, YOU  
GO, DYING INTO  
INSTANTANEOUS REBIRTH  
AND BIRTHING INTO  
INEVITABLE DEATH. AND IN ALL  
OF IT YOUR MISERY  
INCREASES. MORE PEOPLE,  
LESS FOOD, MORE  
TECHNOLOGY, LESS  
PRIVACY.

BOMBS AND  
ANTHRAX AND EBOLA,  
TERROR IN THE STREETS,  
DOORS LOCKED AGAINST  
NEIGHBORS AND ANONYMOUS  
CRIME, AGAINST COMMUNITY AND  
EACH OTHER. MOTHERS DROWNING  
THEIR CHILDREN BECAUSE THEY CAN'T  
HANDLE THE STRESS OF THE VERY ACT  
OF CREATION. ITSELF THEY  
UNDERSTAND THAT WHAT THEY BRING  
IN WILL KNOW ONLY MISERY SO THEY  
END IT, END IT FOR THEMSELVES,  
FOR THEIR CHILDREN. THEY  
GET IT OVER WITH.

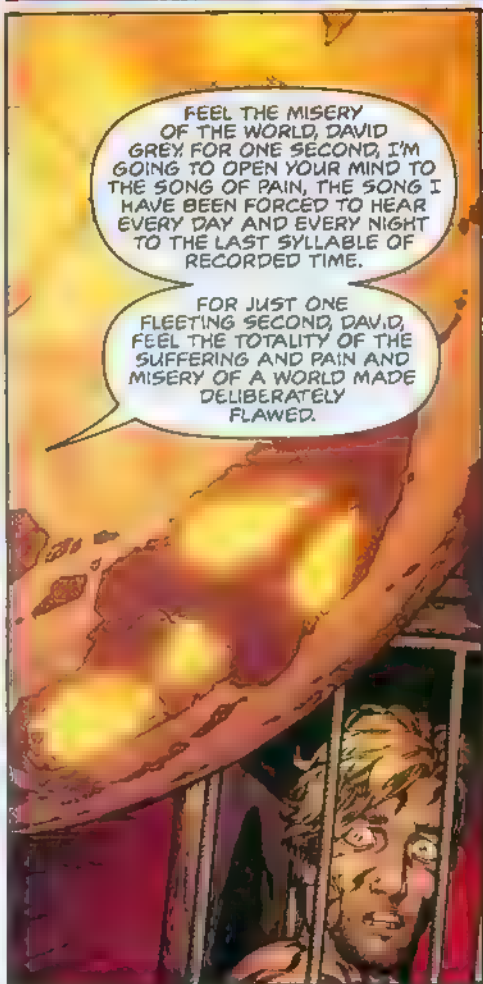
TIME FOR THE  
CHILDREN TO  
RETURN THE FAVOR.  
TIME TO OVERTURN  
CREATION AND  
START AGAIN.  
BUT HOW?



YOU DO IT BY  
ACCELERATING THE MISERY,  
REVEALING IT FOR WHAT IT IS, THE  
PRIMAL FLAW IN CREATION'S DESIGN. ONCE  
THERE WAS ONLY LAZARUS, THE FIRST TO  
FALL BETWEEN THE CRACKS AND BE  
FORGOTTEN. MORE HAVE COME THROUGH EVERY  
DAY, AND EVERY DAY THE LIE STANDS MORE AND  
MORE REVEALED, THE FLAW IN CREATION'S  
DESIGN BECOMES MORE EVIDENT, AND FINALLY  
EVERYONE IS ON THIS SIDE OF THE  
EQUATION, NOT THE OTHER SIDE. MY  
SIDE. NOT H.S S.D.E.

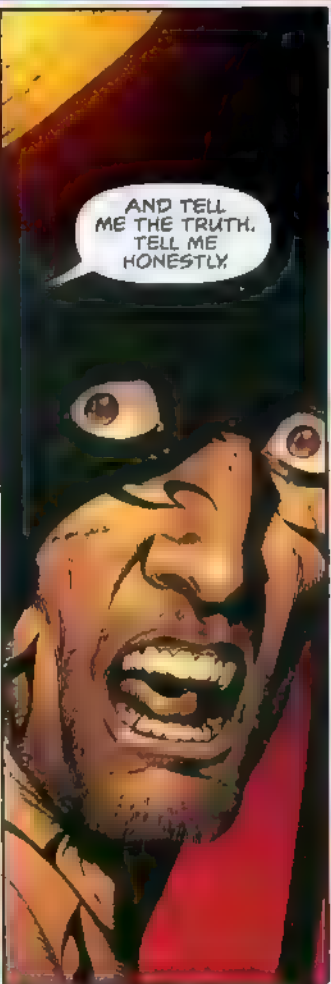


AND THEN...THEN  
IT'S OUR TURN TO DESIGN  
A WORLD OF OUR OWN. A  
WORLD WITHOUT GUILT, ONLY  
PLEASURE. WITHOUT PAIN, ONLY  
JOY WITHOUT LIMITS. UTTER,  
ABSOLUTE FREEDOM.



FEEL THE MISERY  
OF THE WORLD, DAVID  
GREY FOR ONE SECOND, I'M  
GOING TO OPEN YOUR MIND TO  
THE SONG OF PAIN, THE SONG I  
HAVE BEEN FORCED TO HEAR  
EVERY DAY AND EVERY NIGHT  
TO THE LAST SYLLABLE OF  
RECORDED TIME.

FOR JUST ONE  
FLEETING SECOND, DAVID,  
FEEL THE TOTALITY OF THE  
SUFFERING AND PAIN AND  
MISERY OF A WORLD MADE  
DELIBERATELY  
FLAWED.



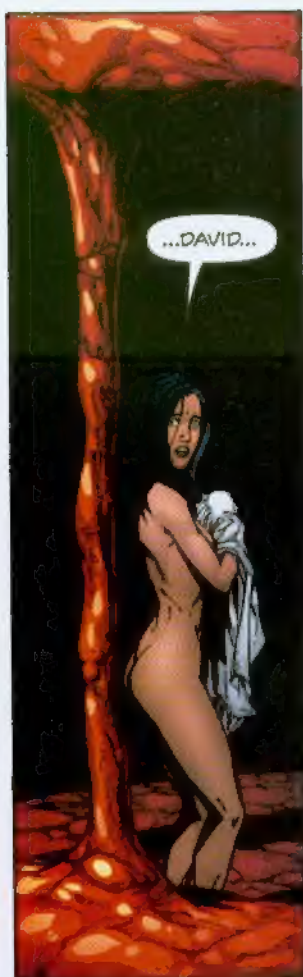
AND TELL  
ME THE TRUTH.  
TELL ME  
HONESTLY.

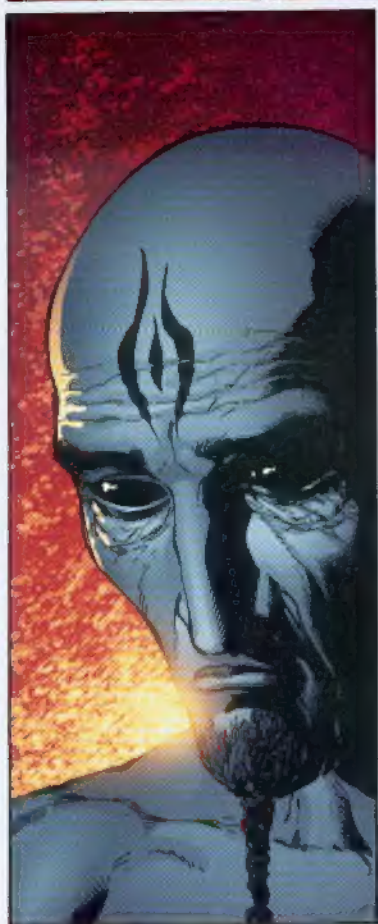
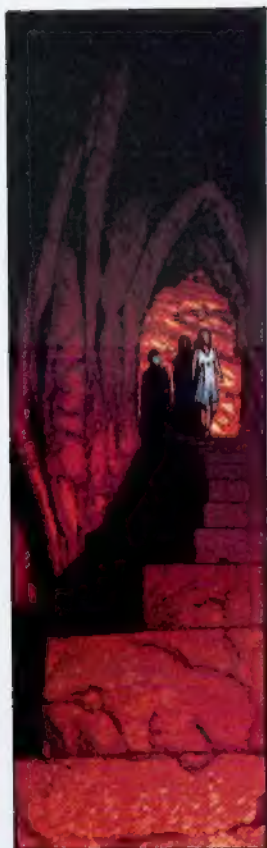


IS THIS NOT  
A WORLD THAT  
DESERVES TO BE  
PUT OUT OF ITS  
MISERY?











...SSSSSSHHHHHHHAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!



TO BE  
CONTINUED...